

Examiners' Report

Set 02

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills ICT Level 2 (ICT02)

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Introduction

This series was the second release of On-Demand tests. The scenario was a garden fencing contractor called WellMeet Fencing. The On Demand tests are designed to be of the same standard as the paper based series held during scheduled examination windows. The main variations between the tests result from the differences between printed responses and digital responses.

Many of the issues noted in the paper based series have also been evident in responses during this Set 02 On-Demand release. Reports from examiners indicate that there continue to be a small number of centres where it appears that candidates have been poorly prepared for the test particularly for spreadsheet tasks. A pass in the test is intended to be approximately equivalent to the Grade B standard in GCSE. Responses from candidates in this examination do not always reflect this standard.

It is a requirement of this test that candidates should have access to the internet **only** during the first 15 minutes of the test. A number of centres appear to be unaware of this stipulation and facilities for offline email are not made available to candidates for the purpose of this test. There are some centres where the use of students' personal email accounts (e.g. Hotmail, Yahoo mail etc.) is evident. Centres need to ensure that candidates are reminded that there could be serious consequences if they are found to be breaching the code of conduct. There is also evidence from pupil responses that centres are not setting up new accounts for each series and data files from previous series are available and that items in email clients are not cleared before the start of the examination.

Centres are also reminded that it is a requirement that separate user areas, not accessible to candidates outside their sitting of the test, should be prepared. Some screenshots produced during the test show that a small number of candidates are using their normal desktop and documents folders. It is also important that data files should be copied into each candidate's user area before the start of the examination window.

It has also been noted by examiners that quite a high proportion of centres are not printing out copies of the question paper before the examination. They are, instead, providing candidates with electronic copies of the question paper. This is not appropriate when the security of the examination is critical. It is the responsibility of the centre staff to maintain the integrity of the question paper before, during and after the test. The risk of a security breach is greater if candidates are permitted access to electronic copies of the question paper during the time they are allowed internet access in the test itself.

Centres must provide the appropriate facilities for candidates to complete all tasks within the specification. The guidelines for setting up the user accounts for the test are clearly laid out in the Information for the Conduct of the Examination issued for each series. Further guidance on email and internet access is available from Pearson Edexcel if required.

There were, as usual, five tasks to be completed during the test. As mentioned previously these were based on a scenario about a garden fencing contractor.

Task 1 – Internet Research

This task was generally well completed by candidates. In this series, candidates were asked to use the internet to find the permitted height of a fence next to a roadway in the UK.

Candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to finding the correct answer. Where candidates lost marks, it was for failure to include a screen shot the search engine page, submitting screen shots which were unreadable (even when zoom facilities are available to enlarge the screen shot).

The second part of the task asked candidates to indicate ways they could use to check the reliability of the source of the information. This task was less well done with too many vague answers. Better candidates mentioned checking for a government website and publication date of the site.

Areas for improvement and development:

- understanding the term “search engine”
- understanding the term “search criteria”
- producing screenshots that are legible and where the information can be read
- copying website addresses, not those of the search engine used, accurately and completely
- understanding the importance of reliability in relation to website information
- acknowledging appropriate sources of information.

Task 2 – Spreadsheet

In the spreadsheet task, candidates were required to calculate the cost of different quantities of fencing. The task consisted of five parts. Candidates completing the On Demand test benefitted from not being required to produce a separate formula view since examiners were able to open the spreadsheet and view formulae.

In part (a), the candidates were asked to enter a simple formula to calculate the number of posts needed for a number of fence panels. They were given the hint that the number of posts was one more than the number panels. A surprising number of candidates were unable to gain the mark for this task with many not using a formula or using the SUM function inappropriately.

In part (b) candidates were informed that the price list for different size panels was in a table and they were asked to use a lookup function and the table of prices to calculate the cost of the panels for the customer. This was not well done by the majority of candidates. There was evidence that the lookup function was not fully or properly utilised by the candidates. Instead

of using the lookup function as indicated in the question many candidates did not use any function and typed in values. Some centres have queried the inclusion of the lookup function in these Level 2 examinations. The use of a lookup function is exemplified in the sample assessment material for the qualification and, therefore, forms part of the accepted expectations of candidates. A briefing paper about this is available on request from the staff at Pearson Edexcel.

In part (c), candidates were asked to calculate the profit obtained from each sale. The candidates were expected to use an absolute cell reference to complete this part of the task. Many candidates lost marks because they used the value rather than the cell reference or used the SUM function inappropriately.

In part (d) candidates were asked to format the spreadsheet to make it clear and easy to understand. The majority of candidates scored well on this task. However, formatting features are often used without apparently real thought to clarity and understanding, e.g. inconsistent borders or vertical shading effects.

In part (e) candidates were asked to create a chart that showed the price charged to each customer. Whilst most candidates were able to produce the appropriate chart, many lost marks due to incomplete labels and titles. The omission of a title or inclusion of an inappropriate one results from the candidates not using the text provided in the question paper. Also significant was the number of candidates who included unnecessary information in the chart (e.g. a legend when there was only one set of data or additional columns).

Areas for improvement and development: (not all these were assessed on this occasion)

- formatting a spreadsheet
 - currency
 - decimal places
 - appropriate borders and shading
 - word wrapping
 - appropriate row heights and column widths
 - use of text formatting to enhance visual clarity e.g. bold, italics, font size
- using formulae
 - simple formulae using arithmetic symbols (+, -, / and *)
 - using functions e.g. SUM, AVERAGE, IF, MAX, MIN and VLOOKUP where appropriate
 - using efficient formulae (e.g. correctly using the SUM function only for adding up a range of cells)
 - using absolute and relative cell references
- sorting and filtering
 - on one column
 - on multiple columns (secondary sorting or sorting within a sort)
 - expanding selection to include full table in a sort
 - using appropriate filters to show selected data from a table

- charts
 - pie charts, line graphs and column or bar charts with one or more series of data
 - understanding the appropriateness of different chart types
 - inserting a suitable title on the chart
 - using legends where appropriate
 - adding relevant axis labels

Task 3 – Presentation of information

Task 3 usually brings together information from the internet research and the spreadsheet tasks and text and images from the data files to create a product aimed at a particular audience. Candidates may also be expected to select appropriate text and place images to produce an integrated document.

In Task 3a, candidates were asked to produce an A5-sized flyer for the fencing company using images and text selected from the data files and information from the research in Task 1. Many candidates lost marks because they did not check that they have met the requirements of the task by including the correct items. For example, in this test, they were expected to omit text about boiler and central heating systems. It seemed that many candidates did not give any consideration to the appropriateness of this text in a flyer about garden fencing.

In Task 3b, candidates were asked to create a new folder and copy files into it. At Level 2, candidates are expected to be able to create a folder with a given name and understand the difference between copying and moving files. Many candidates lost marks because they did not copy the required files.

Areas for improvement and development:

- selection of appropriate software for producing an on-screen or paper-based presentation of information
- production of documents on different page sizes and orientations
- integration of information from a variety of sources including text, images, tables and graphs
- consideration of suitability in selection of text/images for an audience and purpose
- use of formatting techniques effectively:
 - text enhancements – bold, italic, underline, font sizes
 - selection of font styles
 - selection of suitable font sizes for a presentation
 - hyphenation
 - text wrap and alignment
 - checking for consistency in font sizes and styles
- checking the documents for truncation of text and/or images
- using software tools to check spelling and grammar
- checking that all the criteria stated in the question paper have been met
- consideration of fitness for purpose
- consideration of audience.

Task 4 – Communication: preparing an email

Candidates were asked to prepare an email with a suitable subject and an attachment. The quality of work for this task, particularly in the copying of email addresses and the content of the message is too often below the standard expected at Level 2.

Several candidates do not appear to check that email addresses are correctly entered. Since incorrectly addressed emails will not reach their intended recipient, this is a critical aspect of functionality.

Examiners continue to find that email messages are not suitable in tone or content. Often the messages are not spell and grammar-checked and the tone is not suitable for a formal message. For example, "Hi" and "Hey" are considered to be inappropriate ways to address business email messages to unknown contacts. The expectation at Level 2 is an appropriate greeting followed by an accurate, concise message which meets the criteria in the question paper.

Many examiners continue to comment on candidates who fail to gain marks because the screenshot evidence provided is not readable. Candidates are expected to check the quality of their work to ensure that examiners will be able to read the contents. Sometimes candidates have cropped screenshots and removed necessary details to gain full credit.

Examiners report that there are several centres where there is evidence that candidates are accessing the internet during this task and using online accounts – often these are the candidates' personal accounts. This is unacceptable and a breach of the code of practice for this examination. Candidates who access online accounts may face disqualification for these breaches. Examiners also noted that some candidates seemed to be using an existing account with several (often personal) contacts already in the address book and messages in the inbox/outbox/sent boxes.

Some examiners have reported that candidates at some centres do not appear to have access to an offline mail client and produce 'emails' in word processing software. Since these do not provide suitable evidence of attachments or ability to use email, centres which do not provide the candidates with offline email clients are disadvantaging their candidates unnecessarily.

There are many ways of producing the evidence using offline account systems – for example the setting up of Outlook or Outlook Express accounts as part of the examination account used by the candidate. Centres are reminded that the accounts set up for the test should be cleared of previous contents. Further guidance is available on the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills website.

Areas for improvement and development:

- selection of appropriate offline email client software
- careful copying of text from the question paper

- accurate copying of email addresses
- attachment of files to an email
- using a suitable subject line for an email
- using appropriate language for business email messages
- ensuring that screen shot evidence is readable.

Task 5 - Using ICT

Often responses to Task 5 are entered at the end of the Responses document used for Task 1.

In this series, candidates were asked questions about arranging emails from the sent items folder and tools available for online collaboration. Many candidates did not gain full marks for the first part because they included sorting by recipient. There were many vague answers to the second part which did not fully answer the question. Many were able to identify a method but did not have a description which included the concept of being able to share documents/ideas in real time.

Areas for improvement and development:

- Ability to identify ICT problems and respond appropriately.

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